

Private Ownership of Idaho's Forests and Woodlands

The Forest Legacy Program focuses exclusively on private lands, specifically private lands that can be classed as forest and woodlands by virtue of having some tree cover. In Idaho, there are two main classes of forested lands—"timberlands" and "woodlands", and two classes of forest landowners—"industrial" and "nonindustrial" (*USDA Forest Service*). Each class of land provides some values, either in terms of direct economic values associated with timber or livestock production or in the wildlife, recreational, aesthetic or other values that each owner perceives. Similarly, each landowner has in mind different goals for managing their land to produce or maintain those values. A discussion of each of these attributes of private land ownership is pertinent to a fuller understanding of how the Forest Legacy Program might function in Idaho.

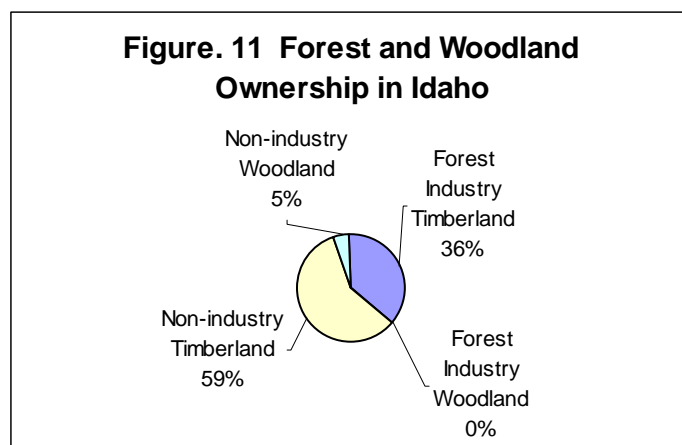


Table 8. Forest and Woodland Ownership In Idaho (Acres)

	North Idaho	South Idaho	Total
<i>Forest Industry</i>			
Timberland	1,066,058	173,406	1,239,464
Woodland	0	14	14
<i>Non-Industrial Owners</i>			
Timberland	1,489,720	538,607	2,028,327
Woodland	0	168,278	168,278
Total	2,555,778	880,305	3,436,083

(Source: *USDA Forest Service*)

As noted on page 5, "timberland" and "woodlands" as used by the Forest Service in their periodic surveys of these lands have two distinct meanings. "Timberland" includes areas where tree species that are normally used commercially make up at least ten percent of the other tree species growing on the site. "Woodlands" include those other lands where the tree species are not commercially valuable. In a refinement of that basic concept, the Idaho Tax Commission allows land to be taxed as "forest land" if it is essentially managed for that purpose. Essentially, then, the definition of "forest land" in the Idaho Code does not include "woodlands" as defined above. Most of these lands are

classed by the Tax Commission as “dry land grazing”, with a separate tax treatment for them. Table 9 summarizes forestlands by county, according to the Tax Commission. The difference between the total timbered acres treated by the Tax Commission as “forest land” (2,230,159) and the total reported by the Forest Service (3,436,083) is likely to include parcels of land under five acres which Idaho law prohibits being classed as “forest land” and the “woodland” acres generally classed for “dry land grazing”, even if there is some tree cover.

Table 9. Private Timber Owners by County

County	Timbered Acres	¹Average County Ownership	²NIPF Average Ownership
Adams	72,159	355	80
Benewah	240,569	282	93
Boise	81,417	457	177
Bonner	189,683	86	48
Boundary	113,533	83	53
Clearwater	405,543	594	69
Elmore	6,195	163	163
Gem	840	280	280
Idaho	66,461	89	72
Kootenai	340,001	93	66
Latah	211,637	145	63
Lewis	39,936	158	134
Nez Perce	21,576	77	77
Shoshone	317,557	659	104
Valley	123,051	393	97
Totals/Averages	2,230,159	261	105

¹Includes ownerships over 5,000 acres in size.

²All timbered owners under 5,000 acres in size.

Source: Idaho Tax Commission

Beyond distinctions based on the amount of tree cover and the purposes for which the land is managed, there is another major distinction to be made in land ownership. “Industrial lands” include those owned by forest products companies and where the clear ownership objective has been to produce commercially valuable crops of timber (although companies are increasingly looking to the other economic value that these lands might have). “Nonindustrial private landowners” (often referred to by NIPFs) have always been somewhat of an enigma to foresters. While these lands typically produce large volumes of timber, this is not often cited as the major ownership goal of these landowners (*Force and Lee*), and how to educate and help these landowners in managing these forests has resulted in numerous public programs and private efforts.

In Idaho, Drs. Jo Ellen Force and Harry Lee set out to determine the social and demographic characteristics of nonindustrial forest landowners, along with their perceptions of the benefits of owning their lands and their plans for it. Among their other findings, they concluded that the reasons for owning forestland in Idaho were generally consistent with those reported in other states. Reasons other than timber production were frequently mentioned and these included recreation, wildlife and aesthetics, as well as simply a “feeling of satisfaction” from owning the land. Although nonindustrial lands typically supply one quarter of Idaho’s annual timber harvest, one-fourth of Idaho’s nonindustrial landowners do not plan to harvest timber and nearly half are undecided. These landowners state that the loss of recreational and scenic values is the most important reason for not

harvesting timber, although over half the landowners surveyed reported that they have harvested timber in the past.

Idaho's typical nonindustrial landowner is most likely to be retired, with an average age of 56. Most live on farms or ranches or in small towns, although this characteristic is most evident among larger nonindustrial landowners. The three major reasons for owning land include preserving wildlife, providing wood for their own purposes, and aesthetic enjoyment. Much farther down the list was "income from timber", although larger landowners frequently cited that reason along with the importance of the land for grazing. Significantly, fifteen percent of the landowners planned to sell a part of their lands within five years and 25 percent of the smaller landowners anticipated selling at least part of their lands.

Despite the reported lack of enthusiasm among many nonindustrial landowners for harvesting timber, this ownership provides timber in an amount that very nearly captures annual sawtimber growth of 447.6 million board feet. On the other hand, timber harvests on industry lands typically exceeds annual sawtimber growth of 292.6 million board feet, largely because the older, slower growing timber is being cut and replaced with new trees that will grow more rapidly (*USDA Forest Service*). All told, timber from both industry and nonindustrial lands make up generally half the total timber harvest in the state.

Table 10. Private Timber Harvests in Idaho*

Year	PNIF	Industry	Total, All Sources	Percent PNIF	Percent Ind
1992	393,192,672	339,578,711	1,664,500,000	23.6	20.4
1993	393,192,672	368,727,488	1,610,300,000	24.4	22.9
1994	414,413,155	440,732,887	1,507,100,000	27.5	29.2
1995	344,714,486	464,630,560	1,380,600,000	25.0	33.7
1996	289,869,165	532,533,749	1,414,400,000	20.5	37.7
1997	328,224,761	550,414,402	1,368,500,000	24.0	40.2
1998	263,364,925	489,893,430	1,272,200,000	20.7	38.5
1999	355,706,717	532,255,101	1,336,600,000	26.6	39.8
2000	317,652,341	492,497,137	1,212,600,000	26.2	40.6

*Volumes in Board Feet

Source: USDA Forest Service and Idaho Dept. of Lands

Implications for the Forest Legacy Program

Two aspects of private lands and private landowners highlight the importance of the Forest Legacy Program in Idaho. First, the steady rise in the percentage of timber cut each year from private lands implies that any reduction in the amount available from that source could contribute to the closure of more mills in Idaho. The Legacy Program's goal of reducing conversions of forest lands to nonforest uses will help maintain "working forest landscapes" that will support a viable forest industry in the state.

Despite a significant number of landowners who doubt that they will ever sell timber, the evidence would indicate otherwise. It would be very rare indeed to find a parcel of nonindustrial land where some past cutting has not taken place, and substantial volumes are cut each year from this ownership. Even if a particular landowner has no plans to harvest timber, forest health considerations or a

change in ownership can easily cause a change in that objective. Private nonindustrial lands play a major role as a source of timber within the state and will likely continue to do so.

Second, nonindustrial landowners, particularly, value all that their forests provide in addition to timber. In fact, it is the loss of the non-timber values that is most often cited as the reason for not harvesting timber. Given some reluctance to harvest timber in order to protect those scenic, recreational and wildlife values, it would seem that there would be an equal reluctance to see these values lost through development of the land. On the other hand, Drs. Force and Lee found that 28 percent of the landowners viewed their lands as an investment and 15 percent of all landowners (25% of smaller landowners) did indicate that they would likely sell at least part of their lands within five years. This would argue that nonindustrial landowners are motivated by money. To the extent this is true, increasing land values would be an enticement to monetize the value of nonindustrial forestlands. The Legacy Program, however, would allow landowners to achieve a significant portion of that value while still meeting their clear goals of protecting all the other values.